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CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

"CHRISTIANITY OLD AND NEW."

This is the title of a course of lectures delivered by Prof. B. W. Bacon, D.D., of Yale Theological Seminary, at the University of California. In order to appreciate and understand the point of view of the lecturer it is necessary to recall the following facts: In the *Hibbert Journal* for January 1910 the present writer had an article entitled "The Collapse of Liberal Christianity"; and a year later another article on the same general theme under the caption, "Whitherward? A Question for the Higher Criticism," carrying the argument a little further. The purpose of both articles was to show that liberal Christianity had failed in its attempt to find a historical Jesus. The main proposition was that liberal Christianity began its course by repudiating the Christ of the church and by planting itself on a purely human Jesus who, of course, it took for granted was a historical person. It was pointed out that it had been engaged for over a hundred years in seeking for this historical Jesus, because he was necessary to the existence of the movement as a protest against orthodox Christianity. The writer admitted at the time and all along that the title of the article was ambiguous and was therefore liable to be misunderstood. But the meaning attached to the words was fully explained in the course of the article, which was not to assert that liberal Christianity or liberal thought had collapsed as a whole, but only that the attempt to find a historical Jesus had failed.

In the *Hibbert Journal* for July 1911 appeared an article by Professor Bacon, entitled "The Mythical Collapse of Historical Christianity," in which there was a misunderstanding of the above. A meaning was attached to the "collapse" never intended by the writer and a consequent wrong impression given to the readers

of the Journal and the public generally. Professor Bacon called upon "those who were reading in a contrary sense such momentous signs of the times as the modernist movement, extension of the voluntary principle in church support, church federation, and the new impetus in religious education, not to be suddenly dismayed." That is to say, Professor Bacon represented the writer as asserting that modern thought had suddenly come to a standstill! What was meant by the title was one thing and one thing only, that the liberal search for a historical Jesus had proved a failure. In other respects the writer believed with Professor Bacon that liberal Christianity "so far from being in danger of collapse is advancing to-day by great strides towards the place of leadership and authority in modern religious life." And not only so, but he regards the effort of Professor Bacon and others to stop with a historical Jesus as a failure of liberal Christianity to be true to its principles. Liberal Christianity in the large sense of that phrase is, as Professor Bacon says, "but beginning its career, and rejoices as a strong man to run a race." And in pursuance of the course under the leadership of the Dutch school of criticism, of which Professor Bacon makes no mention either in his *Hibbert* articles or in this book, it is fulfilling its mission and carrying out its principles to their legitimate conclusion. Why should it come to a standstill with the historicists of Germany? Surely the doctrine that the central figure of the New Testament was a historical person is not a finality. The writer believes that those who refuse to stay with the historicists and who go on to interpret the New Testament in a more spiritual sense than is possible on that theory are *par excellence* liberal Christians. They are just now enduring what all must endure who venture to call in question the results of "established scholarship," and to affirm the symbolic character of the Gospel story.

In his new book, *Christianity Old and New*, Professor Bacon shows that he has come to see the mistake he made as regards the word "liberal." Not that he acknowledges it in words—that perhaps would be too much to expect—but it is implied in what he says. He contrasts the view the writer advocated in his articles with that of President Eliot of Harvard University in his essay entitled "The Religion of the Future." President Eliot has for a generation and more been the most distinguished Unitarian in America. He has been looked upon as the leader of Unitarians all that time, and his prognostication of what in his judgment Christianity is to be in the future has been universally accepted by Uni-

tarians all over the world as embodying for them the truth. It is not necessary to say that Jesus is presented by President Eliot simply as a man, and that the "religion of the future" which he puts before the world is a Christianity denuded of all those elements which have made it the Christianity of the church. Not only does it lack the virgin birth and physical resurrection, but also those doctrines of incarnation and atonement which have ever been regarded as vital to Christianity. Professor Bacon's summing up of President Eliot's position as set forth in an article in the *Harvard Theological Review* (October, 1909) is worth quoting (p. 38): "President Eliot's reconstruction presents the distinctive type of what has claimed for itself, and has sometimes been accorded, the honorable name of 'liberal' Christianity. To him the mystical doctrines of personal religion, the doctrines of incarnation, atonement, immortality, represent mainly 'pagan' accretion. To restore to Christianity its true message for our times we must trace it back (thinks President Eliot) to its 'Hebrew purity' in the ethical teachings of Jesus. As for what are termed 'the consolations of religion' they will be mainly found in '... a universal good will, under the influence of which men will do their duty, and at the same time promote their own happiness. The devotees of a religion of service will always be asking what they can contribute to the common good.... The work of the world must be done, and the great question is, shall it be done happily or unhappily?' Much of it is to-day done unhappily. The new religion will contribute powerfully toward the reduction of this mass of unnecessary misery, and will do so chiefly by promoting good will among men."

This, then, is "liberal Christianity," at least it is the "liberal Christianity" which the writer had in view and which plants itself on a Jesus who was purely human. Such a Jesus is a necessity for it. Hence the efforts which the Liberals have been making for the last hundred years and over to discover a historical Jesus. Three things are worthy of attention at this point. The first is that this Christianity which President Eliot predicts is to be the "religion of the future" is a distinct break with the Christianity of the church of the past and of the church of the present. In all ages Christianity has been regarded as the religion of redemption; but redemption is eliminated from this conception of it. Professor Bacon recognizes this when he says that it "goes more than half way to meet the Reformed Synagogue and the liberal Ethical Society." None of the great theologians of the past would have recognized this as

Christianity. Professor Bacon asks, "Can this really be the 'Gospel' in which there is not one word of what Paul describes as 'the ministry of reconciliation, committed unto us' as ambassadors for God, 'how that in Christ God was reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses?'" And if Paul would have failed to see in this "religion of the future" his Gospel, so we may be sure would the great fathers and theologians of the church have failed. To one and all Christianity was a redemptive scheme, and they would not have understood a religion which had no incarnation or atonement, and which presented itself to men merely as a system of ethics.

It is safe to say that no church of the present would accept President Eliot's summation of Christianity. Neither the Roman Catholic nor the Greek church could do so. The Anglican church in all lands, the various branches of the Presbyterian church throughout the world, the numerous Methodist bodies, all with one accord would have to repudiate this version of Christianity as not Christianity at all. They would doubtless, as does Professor Bacon, recognize "the nobility of the ethical ideal" involved in it; they would say with him that it is "good as far as it goes, but it does not touch bottom"—and that because it does not meet man's deepest need which is for redemption rather than for ethics. Professor Bacon admits that "it may rightly claim to reflect in large measure the teaching of Jesus"; but it has always been held that the teaching of Jesus so called does not contain the distinctive Christian Gospel, because that consists of something which Jesus *did* rather than what he is reputed to have *said*. And hence the teachers of the church have gone to the Epistles of Paul instead of to the Sermon on the Mount for Christianity's distinctive message.

Some words of Professor Royce, a distinguished member of the faculty of Harvard University of which President Eliot was the head, are worthy of attention in elucidation of this point. In an essay on "What is Vital in Christianity" he tells us: "What is vital in Christianity depends upon regarding the mission and the life of Christ as an organic part of a divine plan for the redemption and salvation of man. While the doctrine of Christ, as his sayings record this doctrine, is indeed an essential part of this mission, one cannot rightly understand, above all apply, the teachings of Christ, one cannot live out the Christian interpretation of life, unless one learns first to view the person of Christ in its true relation to God, and the work of Christ as an entirely unique revelation and ex-

pression of God's will. The work of Christ culminated in his death. Hence, as the historical church has always maintained, it is the cross of Christ that is the symbol of whatever is most vital about Christianity."

Nowhere, perhaps, is the issue involved in this matter so clearly set forth as in the following words of Professor Royce in this same essay. "The question is simply this: Is the Gospel which Christ preached, that is, the teaching recorded in the authentic sayings and parables, intelligible, acceptable, vital, in case you take it by itself? Or does Christianity lose its vitality in case you cannot give a true sense to those doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement which the traditional Christian world so long held and so deeply loved? And furthermore, can you, in the light of modern insight, give any longer a reasonable sense to the traditional doctrines of the atonement and the incarnation? In other words: Is Christianity essentially a religion of redemption in the sense in which tradition defined redemption? Or is Christianity simply that religion of the love of God and the love of man which the sayings and the parables so richly illustrate?" Professor Royce maintains that "the whole authority, such as it is, of the needs and religious experience of the church of Christian history stands on the traditional view that the essence of Christianity consists first, in the doctrine of the superhuman person and the redemptive work of Christ, and secondly in the interpretive life that rests upon this doctrine. The church early found, or at least felt, that it could not live at all without thus interpreting the person and work of Christ."

The second point that needs to be carefully noticed is that Professor Bacon does not accept the historicity of the alleged events on which the doctrines of incarnation and atonement have rested in the past. This comes out both in his *Hibbert* article and in the book under review. New Testament criticism under his able hands gives us "Jesus as teacher and leader of humanity toward the ideal of the brotherhood of the race under the fatherhood of God."¹ On the preceding page he implies that the historical criticism of the New Testament of which he is such an ornament reveals Jesus as "truly human." He claims to be as free as any one to discard legendary elements in Gospel story, such as the virgin birth or physical resurrection. He declares that he has no "prejudice whatever against recognition of the mythological element in the New Testament." He sets all these aside just as much as does President

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. IX, No. 4, page 75.

Eliot, but he does not follow President Eliot in reducing Christianity to a mere ethical system. It is to be presumed that he would agree with Professor Royce in regarding the "reduction of what is vital in Christianity to the so-called pure Gospel of Christ, as he preached it and as it is recorded in the body of the presumably authentic sayings and parables as profoundly unsatisfactory"; but he no more accepts the historicity of those alleged facts on which the redemptive element in Christianity has all along rested than does President Eliot. The redemptive element comes from the "transcendentalized Messianism of Peter and the Hellenistic incarnation doctrine of Paul." These are the moulds, so to speak, into which the preachers of the new religion put their thought of Jesus. To use Professor Bacon's own words, "We cannot conceive any other vehicle of thought or speech than myth through which the preachers of the new religion could give utterance to their undisciplined sense of the teleological significance of what they themselves had witnessed." In his *Making of the New Testament* (page 52) he says that the mystery-religions of paganism formed "the only mould for Christology." That is to say, there was no basis in history itself for the Christology of the New Testament and the church, that basis is found in the apostolic interpretation of Peter and Paul which makes these apostles the real founders of Christianity and not Jesus. This agrees with what Professor Bacon says in the opening of his *Story of St. Paul*: "Christianity as we know it is St. Paul's Christianity." Now this comes as near as can be to the doctrine which Professor Bacon criticised in his *Mythical Collapse of Historical Christianity*. The Messianism of Peter and the Hellenistic incarnation of Paul were subjective experiences of these two apostles. This is divided by the thinnest of thin lines from the doctrine in the two first articles, and contains really all the writer contended for. What has been looked upon as Christianity from the beginning until now does not rest upon facts of history, but upon subjective experiences. Jesus was a man only, but Peter and Paul interpreted him as God. His influence upon them was so great that they could express what they felt about him only by taking advantage of what the devotees of the mystery-religions said of Adonis and Attis and Osiris. This he calls "the golden background of dogma, Pauline and later, against which the historical figure of Jesus has been seen projected by those who transmit the portrait to us." It is not the portrait itself. It is the

"apostolic gospel about Jesus, the Petrine and Pauline interpretation of the significance of his person, his experience, his fate."

The difference between him and President Eliot is that the latter "has no use for it [the gospel about Jesus] but to cast it as rubbish to the void." Professor Bacon's gospel is *about* Jesus, not what Jesus was himself. The New Testament critic is more concerned with ideas than with facts. "When he discriminates concrete fact and event from the contemporary interpretation which they received, it is the thought rather than the thing which concerns him. . . . In this field, it is true, historical facts are not unimportant, because when properly sifted they fail to be classified and interpreted in accordance with modern experience by modern standards. But contemporary judgments of the significance of facts, inferences, convictions, faiths, doctrines, are more important." Professor Bacon thus separates himself from the liberalism which makes its watchword the cry, "Back to Jesus." He follows the pragmatists in that it is the worth of Jesus to the apostles and not Jesus himself which is the important thing. He enters a much-needed protest against the liberal Christian of the President Eliot type who "has but one standard of value, historicity." To throw away the mythical and legendary element which he finds in the New Testament is for him to cast its most precious portion into the sea. He tells us that what would be left would be "an admirably simple summary of human duty," for its "morality would be the law of love," and its "emotion would be of two kinds: First, trust in a Heavenly Father, . . . second, loyalty to the historic Jesus as a sublimely consistent and heroic leader of the world into its ideal and ultimate social order." To this reconstructed Christianity he would not deny the name Christian, just because it "places the historic Jesus in a position of permanent supremacy." But it would not be the Christianity of the New Testament or of the church, for that "historically is a gospel *about* Jesus, originating with the resurrection, which was not a historical fact, but a psychological experience of primitive believers under Greek influences."

The cry "Back to Jesus" which has been the watchword of liberal Christianity—"Christianity as Christ preached it"—has "overleaped itself and fallen on the other side." In the most emphatic way Professor Bacon declares that "the Christian religion did not originate with the earthly life of Jesus. That is an idea which arose after the period of the apostles in the age of the Evangelists such as Mark. Our religion began with the manifestation of the

Son of God which was not a physical but a psychical experience. It began with the cross and resurrection, the doctrine about Jesus." There is little profit in contending about names. But from all this it appears that Professor Bacon agrees with the statement that liberal Christianity has collapsed in the sense that it is not Christianity at all, not Christianity as the New Testament presents it, not Christianity as it has been understood in all the ages of its history. It appears, therefore, that Professor Bacon admits all that the writer's two *Hibbert* articles contended for. The difference is unimportant. Both say that the liberal Christianity represented by President Eliot in his "Religion of the Future" has "collapsed." The proposition of the writer is that it has "collapsed" because it has not been able to find a historical Jesus; Professor Bacon's is that the historical Jesus whom he thinks criticism has discovered does not give us Christianity, for that is "the doctrine *about* Jesus, the interpretation given by primitive believers to the work of God effected by the spirit of Jesus. His death, his resurrection, inwardly experienced by these men as 'the power of God unto salvation'—these are the most important data in all the psychology of religion." Much opprobrium has been cast upon Professor Drews for speaking of the "Christ-myth," but Professor Bacon cites with approval a declaration of "a great scholar of our time, describing the redemption doctrine of the Pauline missionary preaching: 'This whole point of view is a myth from beginning to end, and cannot be termed anything else. . . . It is the story of a God who had descended from heaven.'"

It has been assumed that Professor Drews denied the doctrine of redemption because he spoke of the "Christ-myth"; with how much injustice the following quotation will show: "To think of the world's activity as God's activity; of mankind's development, filled with struggles and sufferings, as the story of a divine struggle and passion; of the world-process as the process of a God, who in each individual creature fights, suffers, conquers and dies, so that he may overcome the limitations of the finite in the religious consciousness of man and anticipate his future triumph over all the sufferings of the world—that is the real Christian doctrine of redemption."² Professor Bacon tells us that Paul's interpretation of the career of Jesus was what it was required to be in order "to fit the capacity of a pre-philosophic age." It was not therefore the truth, but a symbolic representation of the truth adapted to minds incapable

² *The Christ-Myth*, page 298.

of apprehending the truth in its pure philosophic form, a concession to immaturity. What was the redemption which Paul tried to set forth by using the phraseology of the mystery-religions of paganism? Was it the inward work of God effected through the spirit of Jesus only in the minds of the primitive disciples, or was it the world-process of redemption of which Professor Drews speaks? Suppose that what the disciples experienced was a part of this world-process. Which, then, would be the most comprehensive idea of redemption? The historicity of Jesus cannot be necessary to the experience of redemption, for it is an experience which has been felt all over the world. The Roman poet Ovid, speaking of the god Æsculapius, sings:

"Hail, great physician of the world! All hail!
Hail, mighty infant! who in years to come
Shalt heal the nations and defraud the tomb.
Thy daring art shall animate the dead,
And draw the thunder on thy guilty head.
Then shalt thou die; but from thy dark abode
Shalt rise victorious, and be twice a god."

The rising of Adonis from the tomb was celebrated in words which have been versified as follows:

"Trust, ye saints, your God restored,
Trust ye in your risen Lord;
For the pains which he endured
Our salvation have procured."

This is the mould, according to Professor Bacon, into which Paul put his experience of Jesus, but is the experience which Paul and Peter and the rest had the only genuine experience? Suppose we say that both alike are symbolic representations to set forth the cosmic story of the divine struggle and passion, would we not have a grander idea of redemption than that which Professor Bacon stands for? He says in condemnation of President Eliot's repudiation of Peter's Messianism and Paul's doctrine of incarnation that "the very last thing the true critic and historian of religion will do with 'mythical' interpretations of genuine experience is to throw them away." May not the experience described by Ovid and in these lines about Adonis—words which might be sung in any Christian church to-day—express a genuine experience expressed as Paul did his experience in unphilosophic form? No one claims that Æsculapius or Adonis was a historical person, but that does not in-

validate the experience any more than Paul's use of the mystery phraseology invalidated his experience. We are thus led to the crucial question of this whole discussion: Is the historicity of Jesus necessary to the genuineness of Paul's experience?

This is the third question that needs careful attention. I offer the following remarks: First, I find nowhere in this book or in any of Professor Bacon's writings any attempt even to prove the historicity of Jesus. He takes it for granted without an atom of proof. For example, on page 97 of this book he says that "Christianity prevailed because of its more solid basis of historic fact." How does he know that? The assumption is that what succeeds in our world must be based on historic fact. Now there is not a scrap of evidence for this proposition. It is pure assumption. The whole history of the world disproves it. Have we not all learned long ago that the world is led on from stage to stage of progress and knowledge "through illusion to the truth"? Suppose that we grant that Christianity would never have succeeded but for the belief in a historical Jesus, that does not prove that the historicity is a fact. It may, if we understand the times properly, prove the opposite. What if it were another case of concession to immaturity? Could Christianity have conquered the rude tribes that overran the fair fields of the old world, the Huns and Goths and Vandals from the North, had it been presented to them in the form that would satisfy Professor Bacon? Suppose that the story of a historic Jesus arose gradually as a higher type of religion declined, and prevailed just because it was a lower type. The question is, what was the earliest form of the faith? In the middle and latter part of the second century we have a creed setting forth the substance of the faith as a series of alleged historic facts, and we find great churchmen like Tertullian and Irenaeus planting themselves upon that creed and defending it against all comers. This was about the time when the canonical Gospels and Acts were taking shape and slowly gaining authority over the mind of the age. But there were other gospels and acts among the people. When we go back to the second century we do not find one church only, but the growing Catholic or central church in violent conflict with churches or communities which it looked upon as heretical. These heretical communities had their gospels and acts which were circulated among the people or members of these heretical communities. The Catholic or central church triumphed over these communities, and our canonical Gospels and Acts are the marks of the triumph. The

Romanist is right in his claim that the church gave the scriptures to the people in the sense that the canon of scripture was fixed by the church; that is to say, the question whether such and such books were to be admitted to, or excluded from, the canon was determined by the church. We should make a mistake if we came to the conclusion that it was always intrinsic merit that decided the question. To be convinced on this point one has only to read the reasons why there are only four Gospels given by Irenaeus himself in his work against "Heresies."

It is always foolish to find fault with the course of history, and no doubt the triumph of the Catholic or general church and the consequent triumph of the canonical scriptures served some good providential purpose. At the same time it is often the duty of after ages to go back and pick up something of value that has been left behind in the onward march of events. In the Gospels and Acts of these heretical communities we have an instance of this. Besides the four canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, there are the apocryphal Gospels according to the Egyptians, according to the Hebrews, according to Peter and others; and besides the canonical Acts there are the Acts of John, the Acts of Thomas, the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Paul, and others; and these are only parts that have come down to us of what was once a large literature.

The older view of the controversy of the second century is that it was over an elaborate attempt to alter the Christian faith as it had been handed down in the church from the beginning; that the Christian faith was from the first a body of historical facts such as we have in the Old Roman Symbol and the Apostles' Creed, just as it was the older view of Gnosticism that it was an outgrowth of Christianity, a heresy which gradually arose to trouble the church. It is just at this point that we are obliged to suspend our judgment, if not to reverse it altogether, and to regard the summarizing of the faith on the part of the general or Catholic church as the innovation upon an older form of the faith. The heretical Gospels and Acts, therefore, would have to be regarded as the oldest product of the Christian movement in the sense that they set forth the original form of the faith, and that the summary of alleged historical facts by Tertullian and Irenaeus, culminating in the Old Roman Symbol and finally in the Apostles' Creed, is a later heresy.

If we read the Old Roman Symbol and the Apostles' Creed in the light of these heretical Gospels and Acts, we shall discover

the meaning of their various clauses, for we are walking over the grave of a buried controversy; every clause is directed against what was regarded as an innovating error, but was in reality the older view. It was the Old Roman Symbol and Apostles' Creed which were innovations; it was the view of the Gnostics represented by Marcion which was the conservative view. It has been the opinion of scholars up to recent times that the Old Roman Symbol "was already in use in Rome when he came there in 140 A. D., and joined the Catholic church";³ but this scholar shows that all the passages which have been relied upon to bear out such an opinion are seen "not to bear the interpretation put upon them."⁴ "There is no evidence in them nor is there evidence anywhere that Marcion knew and accepted the Old Roman Symbol." And one may add there is no evidence that this rule of faith was old and well known. It was a new thing, and was just coming into recognition. It had not existed from the beginning. The same scholar shows that neither Justin Martyr nor any of the other apologists of the day knew anything of the Old Roman Symbol as a rule of faith. There is evidence that the notion that the faith consists of certain historical facts is growing, but there is no evidence that it had reached the stage of a fixed creed such as it very soon became. There is mention in Justin of the birth, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension as historical facts. There is mention also of Pontius Pilate under whom the crucifixion took place. That is to say, the idea that Christianity consisted of a series of historical facts had evidently become fixed in the mind of the church by the time of Justin Martyr, but when we go back to Ignatius in the first quarter of the second century, while we find him setting forth a strictly historical interpretation of the Gospel, at the same time he does it as though he was stating something new, not what was old and well established. He "protests too much" for one who stands for the old truth. The Old Roman Symbol and the Apostles' Creed were evidently an expansion of an early baptismal formula which was simply "Into the name of the Lord Jesus," or "Into Jesus Christ." This was sufficient for the Jews as their God was the God of the Christians as well, which is evidence that the name "Jesus" was a name for a divine being, and not of a human historical person. When the heathen or Gentiles became Christians it was necessary to add the name "God," as their God was not the God of the Chris-

³ McGiffert's *Apostles' Creed*, page 58.

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 68.

tians, and the word "spirit" would naturally follow. The baptismal formula would thus be, "Into God and Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit."

If there is one thing that has been proved by recent scholarship it is that the Gnostics were the first Christians. The various clauses of the Old Roman Symbol and of the Apostles' Creed were added as the idea of an historical interpretation of the Gospel arose. They were not added to guard against the heresies of the day, but to defend an innovation. The Apostles' Creed alleges seven historical facts about Jesus Christ the son of the Creator, his birth, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension, session at the right of God, and second coming, and all the seven emphasize the reality of the life of Jesus as against the older view. The truth is that the Old Roman Symbol and the Apostles' Creed are evidence that the church had lost the faculty of spiritual vision and had become a prey to the besetting sin of all ecclesiasticisms—the worship of the letter.

What confirms us in all this is the fact that when we go back to the first century we find that there were other communities or churches besides those which were organized around the tradition of a historical Jesus. The Epistles of Paul are evidences of this fact. It is impossible to believe that the churches or communities to whom Paul preached his view of a spiritual Christ or Messiah revealed to him by his own ecstatic experiences or visions were derived from the church of Jerusalem of which Peter and James and John were the founders and which was organized around the story of a historic Jesus. Paul was at variance with Peter and James and John whom he called "pillar apostles" not in a very complimentary way. In the letters of Paul we are introduced to communities or churches entirely different from those which took the synoptic Gospels as their inspiration and guides.

Paul does not follow the synoptic tradition at all; he follows a Christ of his own and speaks of his own gospel. To Paul the views of the "pillar apostles" seemed decidedly materialistic. It is indeed difficult to believe that there was any such record of the life and teaching of Jesus in existence as the synoptic Gospels contain in the possession of the church at Jerusalem; for with an authority such a record would imply, how could Paul have had any chance of successfully withstanding the "pillar apostles," or of persuading the communities or churches formed by them to leave them and follow him? The immense probability is that both "Jesus"

and "Christ" were divine names before the Christian era, that both were equally unhistorical, and that they were brought together as denoting a single being by the movement that afterwards became historical Christianity. Whether this be so or not, Paul's Epistles bear witness to the existence of churches or communities which had been long in existence when Paul visited them. Paul's words and phrases are the same as those in use in these communities or churches; they knew what he was speaking about, so that he did not need to define his terms. Paul had no affinity with churches based upon the tradition of a historical Jesus such as we have in the synoptic Gospels; but he has a very close affinity with those other churches or communities whose members believed in a mystic Christ and whose technical terms were all borrowed from Gnosticism which recent research has proved to be pre-Christian.

Paul was not converted to belief in a historical Jesus. He was changed from being an official persecutor of the Messianic sects to a preacher of a mystic Christ or spiritual Messiah, the conception of which, he declares, he did not derive from man; that is to say, the Christ he preached was born of his own immediate experience and revelation. He got a chance of a hearing for his spiritual gospel because it was on a level with the belief in Jesus. If one had been historical and the other not, he would have been as one beating the air. What emerges clear as daylight is that the churches or communities he founded, as well as those he found already established when going on his missionary journeys, were not communities which believed in a historical Jesus; they were of a mystical nature resembling the Therapeutae of whom Philo tells us in his "On the Contemplative Life"—people devoted to the cultivation of the life of contemplation and of union with God. It is not an unlikely supposition that it was with some one of those communities that Paul spent his three years after his conversion, and that it was the light and inspiration he received from that source which emboldened him to be the apostle he afterwards became. It is here doubtless that we are to find the oldest form of the Christian faith. What we have in the synoptic Gospels is a teaching decidedly lower in spiritual insight and tone than that current in the mystical sects to which Paul ministered. They believed in a Saviour who was a heavenly being; belief in the Logos was a fundamental part of their creed; and if there was a historical Jesus at all, the great probability is that he was a member of one of the mystic sects of which the age was full. It is extremely unlikely

that the historical Jesus shared the ignorant views of the people as the synoptic Gospels represent him as doing. The probability is that in these representations of the synoptic Gospels we have just that kind of misunderstanding which always takes place when a mystical teacher attempts to communicate truth to people on a lower level of life and experience. The supreme misunderstanding was the identification of the historical Jesus with the mystical Christ, the Logos. The real Saviour of men, as the real Jesus would doubtless have been the first to declare, is not a historical person, but a divine being who dwells in the soul as Paul teaches. This belief in a mystic Christ, in a heavenly being, in a divine Logos, long antedated the beginning of our era, both in Jewry and among the Greeks.

Now just as those mystic sects of the first century and before, represented by Paul, embodied a more spiritual conception of religion and of life than that embodied in the synoptic Gospels, so the communities or churches of the second century represented a phase of Christianity that was different from, and opposed to, that taught by the growing and triumphant Catholic church. And it is to be noticed further that this form of Christianity was the original one and that the Christianity of the Catholic church was a development of that. This original form of Christianity is known as Gnosticism. All the apocryphal Gospels and Acts are saturated with Gnosticism. Here is where recent investigations into the genesis and development of Gnosticism help us greatly to discover the first form of the Christian faith. Instead of Gnosticism being an outgrowth of Christianity as has long been supposed—a heresy which was persecuted and finally expelled out of existence—the various forms of Gnosticism, Jewish and Christian, of the early centuries, were only particular cases within a movement that included much more. The apocryphal Gospels and Acts tell us what Gnosticism was much better than the school dogmas of Basilides and Valentinus which we know only through the reports of their ecclesiastical enemies, because they formed the main means of Gnostic public propaganda. There was a very wide circulation of such Gospels and Acts in the second century. They are deeply spiritual in their meaning though the outward form was often fantastic and grotesque enough. But we must remember that it is only to the modern mind that they seem fantastic and grotesque. They were not so to the men of the second century; to every shade of mind of that age they were equally and entirely credible. And it was not the mythical and legendary element that offended the orthodox party of the day; it was the inner

spiritual teaching, and that they assailed with misrepresentation, and tried to overwhelm with ridicule. It is just to say that we of this age would be repelled by the marvelous nature of the stories they relate. The apocryphal Gospels and Acts which embody the inner spiritual teachings of those Gnostics read to us like wild romances, but to them they symbolized actual occurrences of the inner life, facts of direct spiritual consciousness. The teaching is for those who knew the nature of the inner life by direct experience; for all others they were foolishness. We have the principle stated by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: "The natural man perceiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned."

It has always been a mystery how such wild imaginings and learned subtleties as the doctrines of the Gnostics seem to be (as represented by the orthodox Church Fathers) could make any deep impression on the minds of men of that age or indeed of any age. The mystery is explained when we turn our attention to the popular literature of the movement as embodied in the apocryphal Gospels and Acts of the second century; and when, especially, we are able to look below the surface and discern the inner spiritual meaning of the narratives. They were so popular in the second century that they could not be disposed of by ridicule simply, and the orthodox Church Fathers had to have recourse to other means to meet them. It is because of this fact that we have these apocryphal Gospels and Acts at all. The orthodox Church Fathers boldly adopted the most popular narratives from the heretical books, and after carefully eliminating what they deemed the "poison of false doctrine" replaced them in this purified form in the hands of the people. Fortunately for us this purification has not been complete, and some of the "poison" has been preserved. Many things of great beauty are found in these Gospels and Acts amid much that seems fantastic and grotesque. But, as I have said, they are so because we do not possess the key that will open up the meaning. This key is found in the man-mystery, the man-myth, or man-doctrine, which was central in all the mystery institutions of antiquity.

Briefly put, it is the story of the descent of man from his heavenly home and his return to that state of glory after having mastered the powers of the world. There is nothing so ancient as this doctrine; it is lost in the mists of antiquity, and in the centuries immediately preceding the beginning of our era it was a well-devel-

oped doctrine in the whole Graeco-Roman world. It was the jealously guarded secret of every mystery institution of antiquity. The whole ancient world was honeycombed with these mystery institutions. They were practically universal, being found in Chaldea, Phenicia, Palestine, Egypt, Phrygia and Greece; and in every one of them the central doctrine was this myth or mystery of man. In Plato, whose writings were the Bible of the Greeks, we have allegory upon allegory describing the soul of man in his heavenly home. The state of man in this world these Gnostics called a state of death. We have a hint of this in Paul's letter to the Colossians where he describes man as "dead" and his "life as hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). He means that the true life of man is buried in matter and awaits resurrection, which does not mean resuscitation of a dead body, but the awakening of the spirit of man into consciousness of its divine life. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the apostle quotes a part of a Gnostic hymn: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and the Christ shall shine upon thee," and this does not mean a call upon dead bodies to come out of graves, which would be absurd, but a call upon the spirit to awaken out of its state of unconsciousness and realize its true life. With the Gnostics of the apocryphal Gospels and Acts the death of Jesus was the symbol of a profound experience which the individual spirit must pass through on its upward journey as a condition of its further advancement. The resurrection of Jesus they similarly looked upon as a symbol of the new birth of illumination of the spirit, its coming to life from its previous death state. The instruction given in the apocryphal Gospels and Acts, as well as in many Gnostic treatises, such as *Pistis Sophia*, is represented as having been given by Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection, which means that the truth taught is what the soul sees in its state of illuminated consciousness. The germ of the Christ life, the spark of divinity which the poet Browning says "disturbs our clod," the image of God all men bear, the light which every man brings with him into the world, must descend into matter; the "dead" with the Gnostic writers and with Paul are those in whom the consciousness of the divine has not been awakened. Resurrection is the awakening of this germ to life. This is the real resurrection of which the historicized rising from the dead of the body of Jesus the canonical Gospels speak of is a symbol. The story of the descent of the soul into matter, its gradual conquest of matter, its awakening to its true life, and its return to its former state having mastered

the powers of the world is the myth of man found in all the ancient mysteries. It is the same story which the New Testament tells in the form of a symbolic life.

Now from a human point of view it was necessary that such a form of Christianity should not become the Christianity of the church. For very soon came the fall of the Western Empire and the inrush of the barbarians from the north. Very soon a wild sea of savage tribes surged and heaved where once the cultured fields of the Old World had been. It was impossible that the strong virile minds of Goth, Hun, and Vandal could comprehend the religion that satisfied these philosophers of the East. A cruder faith was needed and a cruder faith became the faith of the Catholic church. The purer faith became a heresy and was bitterly opposed by the dominant church. As the Catholic church grew in power it grew too in priestly claim and in arrogance. Even as early as the latter part of the second century it had become a visible hierarchy. We find Irenaeus uttering the famous dictum that where the church is—and even as early as his day the church was a visible organization with its clergy and sacraments—there is the spirit of God, and where the spirit of God is there is the church.

A proud, arrogant, ambitious church in the course of its history has been guilty of many crimes, but perhaps the blackest record its history can show is its persecution of these Gnostics. These people had a long ancestry. "The method of history," says Prof. G. P. Fisher of Yale, "is never magical. In proportion to the magnitude of the event are the length of time and the variety of agencies which are employed in producing it." Professor Fisher applies this remark to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, showing that "never was a historical criticism more elaborately prepared for, and this through a train of causes which reach back into the remote past." But the words apply specially to the advent of Christianity; for as a matter of fact Christianity was in the womb of the pagan world for centuries. As Gnosticism was the child of paganism, so Christianity was the child of Gnosticism. The words of St. Augustine are strictly true. "The very thing which now is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, nor was it absent in the beginning of the human race before Christ came in the flesh, since when the true religion which already existed began to be called Christian." In the nicknames which the heresy hunters of the time hurled at the Gnostics we have a clue to the question whence they derived their teaching. The orthodox Church Fathers

were neither sparing nor nice in the names they applied to the Gnostic heretics—devils, snakes, hounds, wolves, vipers, and first-born of Satan. These names of course do not give us much light except upon those who used them; but when less thoroughly aroused with theological passion, and consequently in less bitter mood, they said that the Gnostics derived their teaching from Pythagoras and Plato and Heraclitus and Cleanthes, and from the mystery institutions of Greece, Egypt and the East generally. This was the truth, but instead of being a reproach it was their glory. This meant that the teaching was the best in the religious teaching of the ancient world. Instead of coming into a world of universal darkness with its one divine light of truth, Christianity came from the same source as Gnosticism. In the Epistles of Paul we have echoes of what was taught in Egypt and Greece two or three hundred years before. There is nothing of which we are so sure as the existence of a well-developed and well-defined doctrine in the Hellenistic world of the first centuries before Christ, of the descent of man from the heavenly or archetypal man, and of his return to pristine glory with the experience he has gathered from his contact with, and conquest of, the world of matter and form. This Paul calls the "mystery" of Christ, the mystery hid from ages and generations, but now made manifest.

The story of a Christ who was the Saviour of the world, the divine man who was the representative of a great spiritual process, the mediator between God and men, the ideal man who was overcome in his struggles for human salvation but conquered in being overcome, is the story which the world has repeated to itself over and over again. It is not original with the New Testament, every feature of it was familiar to those who were initiated into the mysteries. This should be enough to show us that we are not in the presence of literal fact. There is no doubt that the crucifixion as Paul conceived it had cosmic significance—it is not merely the death of a martyr. The center and soul of the gnosis of the ancient world was the Cross. The technical phrase for it among the Gnostics is one used by Paul, the "cross the power of God." Wherever the gnosis had established itself the kernel was the cross. It is obvious that in these places it could not mean the death of Jesus for that was a local happening. It meant the great world-passion, the sacrifice of God in the creation, Deity laying down his life in the universe of matter and form. And to Paul the cross was the symbol of this heart-moving conception.

The interpretation of Paul's determination not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified that makes him mean to refer to a series of historic facts eviscerates it of all real content. In the creation was the Calvary of Deity. The cross is thus the background plan of the universe. To know the cross from this higher standpoint is to know all there is to know; there is nothing beyond this. The cross was the symbol of a profound mystery which opened up the heart of Deity himself to the gaze of the world. The divine sufferer was God himself, who in creating the universe sacrificed himself for it. The cross, therefore, represents the greatest of all sacrifices, not something that happened once and once for all, but something that is eternal and timeless—the sacrifice of God in and for his own creation that could not be unless he poured his own life into it and restricted himself within the forms of matter. “Confessedly great is the mystery of godliness.” Unthinkable in its magnitude is this sacrifice, for it means nothing less than the identification of the infinite with the finite in its lowest forms. Here is the profoundest mystery open to human contemplation to speak of which is possible only in forms of symbol and parable. The literal truth is too vast, too mysterious, too sublime, to be made known to human comprehension. It is the mystery before which angels, we are told, veil their faces; and to gain a single glimpse of it one may well surrender all other knowledge and determine, as Paul did, to know nothing else. Here is the oldest form of the Christian faith. The story of Jesus is the parable of this infinitely larger truth. It is the symbol of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, that is, prior to human history, the emblem of divine body and blood voluntarily sacrificed in outward physical nature and entombed in the lower consciousness of man. It was the claim of the second century Gnostics that Christianity was none other than the consummation of the inner doctrine of the mystery institutions of all the nations; and it is this interpretation of the Gospel story which is set forth in the apocryphal Gospels and Acts. The end of them all was the revelation of the mystery of man which is none other than the mystery of Christ.

DUNDEE, SCOTLAND.

K. C. ANDERSON.

HAMILTON'S HODOGRAPH.

In Mach's *Mechanics* the space devoted to the hodograph of Sir William Rowan Hamilton is barely a page, half of which is